TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S FICTIONAL WORLD

A SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED Ph.D. THESIS

IN ENGLISH

IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

For

Submission to

LALIT NARAYAN MITHILA UNIVERSITY

Kameshwar Nagar, Darbhanga, Bihar

Supervisor

Dr. A. K. Singh

University Dept. of English

LNMU, Darbhanga

(Bihar)

Research Scholar

Ajita Singh

PAT 2021-22

Roll no. 22070012

Ph.D. Course Work Roll no. 01

1. **Title: Treatment of History in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Fictional World**

2. **Statement of the Problem:** Literature reflects the tendencies of the age in which it is produced, and there is always a great literary artist who becomes the mouth-piece of his Age, and gives expressions to its hopes and aspirations, its fads and fetishes, its fear and doubts, its prosperity and enterprise in his works. Such an artist is Ngugi wa Thiong'o. He is one of the best-known Kenyan novelists, and by popular convention, regarded as a leading spokesperson of the indigenous African literature and culture. He is known for addressing socio-political issues and the impact of colonialism in his novels. He accumulates the raw materials for his writings from the history of his country, and gives them artistic flavour to promote his ideas. His treatment of history often involves a critical examination of the colonial past and its repercussions on African societies. His works are remarkable for their attempt to challenge the dubious civilizing claim of the colonizers. In fact, all his novels published so far right from "**Weep Not, Child**" (1964) to the present, deal with historical events like Kikuyu, Mau Mau, led by the Kenya Land Freedom Army, and other political and national movements. In 1938, most of the fertile land was taken from the Kikuyu people by the White Settlers, and large armies of landless men were forced to sell their labour to the white farmers on their own ancestral lands. Ngugi also lost his land and became tenants. Since his childhood, he developed a scathing hatred and disturbing psychological nuances towards White domination that later shaped his literary career. The historical contexts provide a backdrop for his narratives, shaping characters and plotlines as he addresses social and political issues. His novels have been greatly influenced by historical events like Mau Mau Uprising of 1952, Shifta War of 1963, and Independence of Kenya in 1963.

Postcolonial writing is rooted in the historical process of colonization, and history and its critical reading and interpretation as well as its implications for the postcolonial

communities became the raw materials for Ngugi's novels. His novels played a vital role in arousing national consciousness, and forming national identity. Through his writings, he vehemently challenged, tampered, and contested colonial discourses. His writings became the representative of the moving spirit in the nationalist movement. Ngugi is fully aware of the transformative power of literature, and in this line, he thinks it is the moral responsibility of any writer to respond to historical, political, and social milieu of his/her time. In his book, ***Writers in Politics*** (1981), Ngugi writes:

> A writer's subject matter is history: i.e. the process of man acting on nature and changing it and in so doing acting on and changing himself. The entire changing relations of productions and hence the changing power relations consequent on mutable modes of production is a whole territory of a writer's literary concern (72).

Ngugi's novels, however, are not photographic representation of history. Rather he gives creative twist to the historical events and rewrite history of the country from the perspective of the formerly silent colonized subject. He investigates history through the gaze of underdogs, and reexamine and reinterprets history through the lens of common folks and peasants. His treatment of history in his novels is splendidly embodied to suit the political and artistic purpose.

While discussing Ngugi as a writer of historical novels and his response to traditional history, the questions that arise in the mind of a sensitive student of literature are as follows:

a. What is the nature of his response to historical events?

b. How does he weave historical facts into the texture of his novels?

c. How does history affect the literary merits of his novels?

d. Where shall he be placed among other writers of Kenya?

e. How can he be compared with other Kenyan writers like Margaret Ogola, Grace Ogot, and Muthoni Garland who are well-known for their use of historical events in their novels?

These are the central issues to be focused in the proposed thesis.

3. **Objectives:** The main objective of my research will be to study the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a literary response to traditional history, and the assessment of his contribution in foregrounding history from the perspective of common folks.

4. **Research Coverage:** The present proposed research project will focus primarily on the theme and treatment of history in the selected novels of Ngugi, focusing the interrelationship between history and fiction, and roles of a writer in shaping the course of traditional history.

I. Weep Not, Child: Published in 1964, the novel is set during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and revolves around the life of Njoroge, a young boy growing up in a divided society during the time of British colonial rule. The novel touches several aspects like colonialism, racial injustice, and the devastating impact of war on individuals and communities. It is a powerful and poignant novel that highlights the resilience and determination of individuals in the face of adversity. Through the character portrayal of Njoroge and his family who strive to make a better life in the midst of political and social turmoil, Thiong'o provides deep insight into the complexities of the colonial experience and the lasting scars it leaves on the lives of those affected.

II. The River Between: Set in colonial Kenya, the novel revolves around two neighboring Gikuyu villages, Kameno and Makuyu, separated by a sacred river. The novel explores the themes of cultural identity, tradition, and the impact of colonialism

on indigenous community. Centered around the protagonist Waiyaki, who is torn between his loyalty to his tribe and his desire for education, and who ultimately becomes the symbol of hope and resistance, advocating reconciliation between the two communities, the novels depict the clash between traditional African customs and the influence of Western colonizers. The novel shows how colonialism disrupted and distorted traditional African societies, leading to conflicts and struggles for identity and independence.

III. A Grain of Wheat: Set in a Kenyan village called Thabai and its inhabitants, The novel explores the themes of betrayal, sacrifice, and revolution against colonial oppression. The narrative weaves between past and present, showcasing the complex history and relationships of the characters like Mugo, a war-hero-turned-villain, and Gikonyo and his wife Mumbi. A nuanced and layered portrayal of colonialism, nationalism, and pursuit of independence, this novel reflects on the sacrifice made by individuals in service of a greater cause.

IV. Petals of Blood: Set in the fictional village of Limorgo of Kenya, in the aftermath of independence, the novel deals with revolution, corruption, and the failures of post-independence African governments. It is a hitting critique of the political and economic systems that emerged in Kenya after gaining independence from British colonial rule. The novel highlights the social inequalities, poverty, and exploitation experienced by the characters like Munira, Abdulla, Karega, and Wanja, and their communities.

V. Devil on the Cross: The novel takes place in post-colonial Kenya, and follows a young woman called Jacinta Wariinga. Written in a satirical and allegorical style to critique the social, political, and economic conditions in Kenya after independence,

the novel deals with various aspects, like exploitation, class struggle, and impact of neo-colonialism on African societies. It discusses and records the Kenyan people's struggle against the neo-colonialism and stage of imperialism. In fact, the individuals in the novel have been given a historical role to play in the life of the Kenyan nation. Here the personal has been interwoven with historical very successfully.

5. **Research Hypothesis**: The proposed thesis hypothesizes:

   a. That though history ignites the creative imagination of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and provides raw materials for his novels, he is essentially a novelist, not a chronicler of his time.

   b. That his version of life as embodied in his novels is positive and affirmative in spite of the despairing historical situations they incorporate

   c. That the interface with history does not affect his fictional art rather enriches it.

6. **Research Methodology:** The proposed research work will be based on the textual analysis of the novels under discussion and theories involved in the historicist approach to a literacy work. The ideas and notions generated by Homi K. Bhabha, Frederic Jameson, and Frantz Fanon will also be used as a tool to study the novels. The novels of Ngugi wa are the primary source of my study. Literary commentaries and other references on the primary source will be used. Library consultation will be especially done with encyclopedia. Internet website, especially for the recent reviews, reading articles, journals, etc. will be taken as guiding source.

7. **Work Plan:** The present research project will take the following plan:

CHAPTER I	:	**INTRODUCTION**
CHAPTER II	**:**	**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
CHAPTER III	**:**	**WEEP NOT, CHILD**
CHAPTER IV	**:**	**THE RIVER BETWEEN**

CHAPTER V : A GRAIN OF WHEAT

CHAPTER VI : PETALS OF BLOOD

CHAPTER VII : DEVIL ON THE CROSS

CHAPTER VIII : CONCLUSION

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Supervisor Research Scholar